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Hutchison, Feinstein Re-introduce AMBER Alert Legislation *Senators introduce legislation on seventh anniversary of Amber's death*

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) today re-introduced legislation to expand nationwide the AMBER Alert communications network that helps law enforcement find abducted children. Their legislation was passed by the Senate last year and endorsed by President Bush, but the bill stalled in the House Judiciary Committee.

An AMBER Alert is activated by law enforcement officials to enlist the public's assistance in finding an abducted child. An official Alert triggers information that can be released on highway electronic message boards and broadcast on radio and television.

"We have seen AMBER Alert plans in many different communities work to bring children home safely. To date, AMBER Alerts have helped recover 43 children nationwide. While many communities and states have outstanding AMBER plans, a number of states do not yet have comprehensive, statewide plans," Sen. Hutchison said. "This legislation will help states develop AMBER Alert plans and allow them to effectively communicate with law enforcement agencies across the country. This is critical if an abducted child is taken across state lines."

The AMBER Alert program began in North Texas six years ago. The alert was named for Amber Hagerman, a nine-year-old girl who was kidnapped and murdered while visiting relatives in Arlington, Texas. Currently, a total of 85 cities, regions and states have AMBER Alert plans. "This week, the seventh anniversary of little Amber's tragic death, it is especially important that we move on this legislation and help ensure other parents do not suffer the loss of their precious child."

"I'd like to thank Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison for her leadership on this issue, and for moving this legislation so quickly through the Senate last year," Senator Feinstein said. "Unfortunately, the House did not take up and approve this legislation before the Congress ended. But I am confident that the bill will meet with similar support in the Senate this year, and it is my hope the House of Representatives will approve the bill as well."

"Simply put, this legislation will save kids lives," Senator Feinstein said. "Since the State of California first adopted AMBER alerts just six months ago, 16 AMBER alerts have been issued involving 20 victims. Nine of the victims were abducted by strangers. Six of the victims were abducted by family members. And five were abducted by family acquaintances. But most importantly, each of the AMBER Alerts ended with the child being united with their families. You can't argue with results like that."

The Hutchison-Feinstein bill, known as the National AMBER Network Act, would:

- Establish an AMBER Coordinator within the Department of Justice to enhance the operation of the AMBER Alert communications for the recovery of abducted children;
- Establish voluntary, minimum standards for coordination between various AMBER plans, particularly between states;
- Provide for a grant program in the Department of Transportation to fund, on a 50-50 matching basis, AMBER Alert programs. The bill authorizes \$20 million; and
- Provide for a grant program in the Department of Justice to fund on a 50-50 matching basis, education, training, and related equipment for AMBER Alert programs. The bill authorizes \$5 million.

Joining Senators Hutchison and Feinstein as co-sponsors of the National AMBER Network Act are: Sens. Hatch, Leahy, Frist, Clinton, Ensign, Miller, Voinovich, Crapo, Lugar, Bingaman, Stabenow, Fitzgerald, Feingold, Biden, McConnell, Nelson (Bill), Bennett, Dodd, Landrieu, Collins, Allard, Rockefeller, Wyden, Harkin, and Durbin.

Last year, President Bush issued an executive order to administratively set in place many of the provisions of the legislation. But he also asked Congress to pass the bill so that it could become law, to codify the network for future Administrations.

The Hutchison-Feinstein legislation is supported by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Association of Broadcasters

National Amber Network Alert Act, S. 121

Section 1—National AMBER Alert Network

- The Attorney General, in cooperation with the Secretary of Transportation and the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), shall establish nationwide coordination for the AMBER Alert communications network for instances of interstate travel where gaps exist in the current system. The Attorney General shall not impede or interfere with the current voluntary system of coordination between local broadcasters and law enforcement agencies.
- The AMBER Alert Coordinator at the Department of Justice will serve two purposes:
 - 1) Work with states to encourage more local AMBER plans around the country that can coordinate on a regional basis.
 - 2) Serve as a point of contact to supplement existing local AMBER plans, and facilitate appropriate regional coordination of AMBER alerts.

Section 2—Grant Program for Statewide AMBER Alert Programs

- The Department of Transportation shall establish a grant program, under the Intelligent Transportation Systems program, to fund, on a 50-50 matching basis, statewide AMBER alert programs for recovery of missing and abducted children. The bill authorizes up to \$20 million. States apply to Secretary of Transportation for matching funds.
- Activities funded under this program may include electronic message boards along highways, electronic road signage, and dissemination of information on missing and abducted children.

Section 3—Guidelines

- The AMBER Coordinator, in conjunction with the FCC, local broadcasters, and local law enforcement, shall establish voluntary guidelines for minimum standards in determining the criteria for AMBER alerts and for the dissemination of those alerts.